

In the claims:

Please amend the claims as follows. Claims 1-71 are canceled without prejudice.

1-71 (Canceled)

72. (New) A method of managing metadata associated with media signals using steganographic references in the media signals, the method comprising:

maintaining a database of metadata associated with media signals, the metadata being associated with media signals via references steganographically encoded in the media signals;

when a media signal has been edited, receiving information about the editing at the database, where the reference steganographically encoded in the media signal is used to locate metadata for the media signal that has been edited; and

updating the metadata for the media signal that has been edited such that the database tracks history of the media signal that has been edited, and the reference steganographically encoded in the media signal provides a persistent reference to the metadata for the media signal.

73. (New) The method of claim 72 wherein the references are embedded as imperceptible digital watermarks in the media signals, and the digital watermarks survive format conversions of media signal files carrying the media signals.

74. (New) The method of claim 73 wherein the digital watermarks carry a unique media signal identifier used to look up corresponding metadata in the database.

75. (New) The method of claim 72 including:

receiving a request to access metadata for a media signal including a steganographic reference to the metadata; and

in response to the request, controlling access to the metadata based at least in part on authentication information provided by a system that made the request.

76. (New) The method of claim 72 wherein the database is searchable based on metadata to find media signals having metadata satisfying a particular search request.

77. (New) The method of claim 72 wherein the database is accessed via a router that receives a steganographic reference and routes it to a database corresponding to the steganographic reference.

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78. (New) A computer readable medium on which is stored instructions for performing a method for managing metadata associated with media signals using steganographic references in the media signals, the method comprising:

maintaining a database of metadata associated with media signals, the metadata being associated with media signals via references steganographically encoded in the media signals;

when a media signal has been edited, receiving information about the editing at the database, where the reference steganographically encoded in the media signal is used to locate metadata for the media signal that has been edited; and

updating the metadata for the media signal that has been edited such that the database tracks history of the media signal that has been edited, and the reference steganographically encoded in the media signal provides a persistent reference to the metadata for the media signal.

79. (New) A method for associating auxiliary data with a media signal, the method comprising:

maintaining a database of auxiliary data items associated with media signals, each item being associated with a media signal via a reference steganographically encoded in the media signal;

from a requesting application, receiving a request for auxiliary data associated with a media signal, the request including a reference extracted from the media signal;

using the reference to locate the auxiliary data associated with the media signal in the database; and  
returning the auxiliary data corresponding to the reference to the requesting application.

80. (New) The method of claim 79 including:  
determining whether the requesting application has access rights to the requested auxiliary data.

DI 7-24-04 (New)  
81. The method of claim 79 including:  
determining whether the requesting application has editing rights for the requested auxiliary data.

82. (New) A computer readable medium having software for performing the method of claim 79.

83. (New) A method for associating auxiliary data with a media signal, the method comprising:  
maintaining a database of steganographic links and metadata databases associated with the steganographic links;  
from a requesting application, receiving a steganographic link extracted from a media signal, the link referencing auxiliary data about the media signal;  
using the steganographic link to locate a metadata database that stores the auxiliary data associated with the media signal; and  
forwarding the steganographic link to the metadata database that stores the auxiliary data associated with the media signal.

84. (New) A computer readable medium having software for performing the method of claim 83.